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ABSTRACT

Plans and objectives for a symposium on the development of a system of language instruction for European adults, patterned after the American unit/credit concept, are outlined in this orientation paper. The background and rationale for the symposium reflect an emerging interest in European education which will allow for greater flexibility in curriculum development and for the individualization of instructional programs. Summaries of several preparatory meetings concerning the symposium are included. (RL)

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COMMITTEE FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL EDUCATION
AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Symposium on
"A UNIT/CREDIT SYSTEM FOR MODERN LANGUAGES
IN ADULT EDUCATION"
(St. Wolfgang (Austria), 17 - 28 June 1973)

General orientation paper

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I. Background

In recent years, the Committee for Out-of-School Education and Cultural Development of the Council of Europe has been concerned with the development and application, on a European scale, of the concepts of permanent and recurrent education. These concepts, which are expounded in greater detail in various publications of the Council of Europe (1) may be summarised briefly as follows:

It is expected that increases in educational expenditure will in future be channeled more and more into the provision of long-term part-time study and intermittent periods of full-time study in adult life. This provision will be designed to enable the individual to adapt to the relevant advances in science and technology and their consequences, to equip him for greater social mobility and to provide cultural enrichment.

It is also expected that the provision of an "éducation permanente" will make increasing use of educational technology, developing multi-media systems on a massive scale, exploiting mass-media and regarding personal teaching in an institutional framework as but one element in these systems.

Within such learning systems, a different organisation of examinations and qualifications is expected to develop. Instead of a single global examination in which overall competence is graded in a "subject", or groups of subjects, once and for all, it appears more appropriate to analyse "subjects" into areas of knowledge and skills, so that learning units to be taught and tested may be of a size that can be acquired in a given time as the result of following a course of a particular type. The effective learning of such a unit would then be recognised by the award of a "credit". There would be advantages in adopting a size of unit compatible with the standard USA practice of envisaging the term "credit" as representing an average of 30 hours study or a "semester unit" of 45 hours. By successively acquiring combinations of units/credits, adult

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(1) Compendium (1970) and Synopsis (1971) of studies on Permanent Education - Fundamentals for an integrated educational policy (1971) - Educational technology - Multi media teaching and systems approach (1971) - Educational technology - Media based instructional systems (1972) - Methods and techniques to evaluate linguistic knowledge and skills in adult education and their role in promoting modern language teaching to adults (1970) - Modern language learning in adult education (1971).

students would then build up a study profile appropriate to their individual needs. Certain profiles might then be accepted as attaining different kinds and levels of competence for professional purposes. It is hoped that such qualifications would gain acceptance on a European scale and be transferable between any institution involved as are their American counterparts.

The main value of a unit/credit scheme as described above is seen to lie in the fact that it allows maximal flexibility and individualisation of learning. Modern languages has been selected by the Committee for Out-of-School Education and Cultural Development of the Council of Europe as a key area for the development of a pilot unit/credit scheme, for the following reasons:

(a) Modern Languages is as much the subject of one of the major programmes of the Council of Europe since language learning is a crucial factor in the promotion of European integration and the mobility of populations.

(b) Mobility may evolve a new language need not foreseen in the period of full-time education.

(c) Differing social situations demand different degrees and directions of linguistics knowledge and skills.

(d) Language teaching is inherently a suitable field for the application of media-based educational technology.

(e) International co-ordination of production effort is already recognised as a necessity, since large development and production costs have to be offset by comparable economies of scale.

II. History of project

Following a number of preparatory meetings of experts, a Symposium on "The Linguistic content, means of evaluation and their interaction in the teaching and learning of modern languages in adult education" was held at Rüschlikon, Switzerland, on May 3 - 7 1971, to examine three issues considered central to the introduction of a unit/credit system:

(i) New forms of organisation of linguistic content.
(ii) Types of evaluation within a unit/credit system.
(iii) Means of implementation of a unit/credit system in the teaching/learning of modern languages in adult education.

The Report of the Symposium (Doc. CCC/EES (71) 135) contains a number of recommendations for follow-up action. According to the first recommendation under Topic (iii),"it

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was suggested that the viability of a unit/credit system depended on the findings of a feasibility study." A small working group was subsequently set up, consisting of Mr. J.L.M. Trim (Chairman), Professor van Ek, Mr. D. Wilkins and Mr. R. Richterich.

The group met in Strasbourg on 30 September - 1 October 1971 and agreed to concern itself with the following tasks:

(a) to break down the global concept of language into units and sub-units based on an analysis of particular groups of adult learners, in terms of the communication situations in which they are characteristically involved. This analysis should lead to a precise articulation of the notion of "common core" with specialist extensions at different proficiency levels;

(b) to set up on the basis of this analysis an operational specification for learning objectives;

(c) to formulate, in consultation with the Steering group on Educational Technology, a system defining the structure of a multi-media learning system to achieve these objectives in terms of the unit/credit concept;

The results of these studies will then be made available, in published form, to producers of multi-media programmes and to educational authorities for guidance in the preparation of courses, the evaluation of student performance and the recognition of competent performance at different levels and in different areas of language use.

It was agreed that in view of the urgent need to provide guidance to producers and authorities, the above programme should be based on existing knowledge and short term research.

On the group's recommendation, therefore, contracts were given to Mr. Richterich, Mr. Wilkins and Dr. van Ek, for preliminary papers on theoretical and methodological aspects of certain basic problems, i.e. (i) a model for the definition of adult language needs, (ii) the nature of a competence common to most if not all types of language learner, and (iii) the basic level of competence below which the grant of credits was impracticable. These studies are now well advanced, and will serve as the basis for the preparation of an operational specification of learning objectives, and an attempt to map out an integrated European unit/credit scheme.

At an informal meeting in Strasbourg on 18 February 1972, the group confirmed their view that a European language learning system with a high acceptability potential can be developed more economically by building upon existing resources than by making a completely new start. It is also necessary to take into account the assessment by

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competent local experts of their particular national language-learning needs and their existing provisions for course production, teaching and examination. They therefore formally requested the Council of Europe to arrange a Symposium as a necessary fact-gathering and opinion-sounding step within a concrete research and development programme.

The aims of the Symposium will be:

1. to gather and exchange information about:

(a) surveys of national needs in the language field, and an assessment of the kind and intensity of use made of particular foreign languages by different groups of adults;

(b) existing provisions for adult language learning and teaching in member countries;

(c) the relevant characteristics of adult learners and the proportion of different types;

(d) existing definitions or descriptions of foreign language learning objectives for all age groups and for all types of learner. These will assist in (i) formulating the objectives of unit/credit systems, (ii) establishing the correspondence between levels in the unit/credit system and those distinguished in formal education in different countries, (iii) establishing the prior knowledge which can reasonably be presupposed of adult-learners of different languages in different countries according to the level of their previous education;

(e) plans for the development of a systems approached language teaching, particularly multi-media language courses and methods of individualised instruction, in so far as they are relevant to adult language learning;

2. to sound opinion among representatives concerning the proposals for a unit/credit scheme, based on operational objectives, which will by then have been prepared in outline by the group. The symposium will evaluate these proposals and consider (a) detailed elaboration of a unit/credit, (b) relation to media, (c) principles of evaluation, (d) administrative implementation, (e) outline of pilot studies or schemes;

3. to make recommendations for the future development and implementation of the unit/credit scheme.

As regards the conduct of the symposium, emphasis will be laid on the necessity for thorough advance preparation in order to achieve concrete results in a short time. It

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is essential for invitations to be issued and participants to be named as far in advance as possible. The symposium should be the culmination of a working programme, in which the provision of statistical data, where available, is carried out by correspondence, so that an edited collection can be made available to participants in advance. The deliberations of the symposium should then aim at establishing the actual framework for (a) future research and development, (b) a number of pilot schemes, and (c) administrative steps to introduce and recognise European unit/credits in Modern Languages.

National delegates should be chosen who are able to make concrete contributions to the achievement of these objectives. They should be prepared to play an active part in the preparation for the symposium, particularly the gathering of information detailed in (1) above.

In addition, a small number of experts from relevant non-linguistic disciplines will also be invited to attend and to report on the discussions. The CCC Steering group on Educational Technology will also be represented.

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The provisional draft programme might be as follows:

D Meeting of the co-ordinating Committee (organisers, general rapporteur, speakers, working groups leaders and rapporteurs).

Arrival of delegates.

D1 9.30 - 11.00 Opening of the Symposium followed by general orientation addresses on:
(a) Programme of the Committee for Out-of-School Education and Cultural Development.
(b) Modern languages programme of the Council for Cultural Co-operation by Representatives of the Council of Europe.

11.00 - 12.30 Introduction to the themes of the Symposium (Mr. Trim, General Rapporteur).

15.00 - 18.30 Introduction to the overall scheme, by aspects:
- Analysis of language needs (Mr. Richterich).
- Taxonomy of learning objectives (Mr. van Ek).
- Situational and linguistic organisation of units (Mr. Wilkins).

18.30 Setting up of English and French-speaking working groups (each group to deal with each of the above aspects).

D2 a.m. and p.m. Group work.

D3 a.m. Group work.

p.m. Preparation of group reports.

D4 9.00 - 12.30 Plenary session: discussion enabling participants to supplement the information supplied on the basis of the questionnaire.

15.00 - 18.30 Plenary session: Presentation and discussion of the reports of the three working groups on aspects.

18.30 - 19.00 Setting up of two new groups to consider future action:
(a) Media taxonomy in relation to a unit/credit system.
(b) Techniques of evaluation and administrative problems in course organisation and the conduct and recognition of examinations.

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	21.00 - 22.00	Meeting of Chairman and Rapporteurs of first working groups to consolidate report.
D5	9.00 - 12.30	First meetings of new working groups (a) and (b) (group b) to be split into sub-groups).
	15.00 - 17.00	Group work (a) and (b).
	17.30	Plenary session: Presentation and adoption of first reports.
D6	a.m.	Group work (a) and (b).
	p.m.	Free.
D7		Free.
D8	a.m.	Group work.
	p.m.	Preparation of reports (a) and (b).
D9	9.00 - 12.30	Plenary session: Presentation and discussion of reports, group (a).
	15.00 - 16.30	Plenary session: Presentation and discussion of reports: group (b).
	17.00 - 18.30 and 21.30 - 22.00	Meeting of Chairman and Rapporteurs of group (a) and (b) and members of the Co-ordinating Committee to consolidate reports and prepare joint recommendations.
D10	9.00 - 10.30	Plenary session: open discussion on other business.
	10.30 - 12.30	Plenary session: Presentation, finalisation and adoption of reports.
	15.00 - 16.30	Adoption of common conclusions and recommendations.
D11	a.m.	Departure of delegates. Final meeting of the Co-ordinating Committee to consider results of the Symposium.